

# Main Street

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## Meteorites found at West to be auctioned

**DALLAS** — Two pieces from a meteor that blazed across the Texas sky this month are going from the asteroid belt to the auction block.

Dallas-based Heritage Auction Galleries announced Thursday that it is putting two meteorites up for sale May 17. One is an 8-ounce specimen that could fetch up to \$5,000.

The meteorites were discovered in the West area, about 70 miles south of Dallas, by an Arizona meteorite hunter whose trip was partially financed by an anonymous collector in New York, said David Herskowitz, natural history consultant for the auction house.

“Both specimens are extensively covered with fresh fusion crust from burning through the atmosphere,” Herskowitz said.

People across Texas reported seeing a fireball Feb. 15. The Federal Aviation Administration at first suggested that it could have been debris from colliding satellites, but later said it was probably a natural phenomenon.

A pair of University of North Texas astronomers also discovered two meteorites near West, saying they were about the “size of large pecans.”

The pieces are chondrite, which is “a pretty common type of space rock,” said Ron Dilulio, the director of the astronomy laboratory program at UNT. He and another UNT astronomer have already run one of the rocks through a series of tests.

“We are tracking down the possibility that they are part of a large asteroid collision that was over 100 kilometers in size,” Dilulio said. “They are from the asteroid belt. It appears two huge ones crashed, because this one shows evidence of a catastrophic collision that knocked it into the path of our atmosphere.”

The UNT professors are not selling their rocks, but said they will instead study them and put them on display at the university.

— The Associated Press

# UNI stargazers track down space rocks

By MITCH MITCHELL

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Those strange lights in the sky above Texas on Sunday turned out to be the Earth getting stoned.

On Wednesday, Ron DiIulio, planetarium and astronomy-lab director at the University of North Texas, and his associate may have been the first to track down pieces of stone from space "about the size of a pecan" that hit the ground east of West, the town north of Waco best known for its kolaches.

The fragments that appeared as a fireball in the sky were seen by many people about 11 a.m. Sunday.

DiIulio and Preston Starr, UNT observatory manager, triangulated the meteor's position from video footage — including some from a police patrol car's camera — and from interviews near the impact site, DiIulio said.

DiIulio said the fragments are chondrites, made up of sil-



UNT's Ron DiIulio, left, and Preston Starr hold what they believe are bits from the meteor that fell to Earth on Sunday. They tracked down the position to an area east of West.

STAR-TELEGRAM/MAX FAULKNER

icon, oxygen, with smaller amounts of iron, magnesium and other elements.

"We were at the Czech Bakery, and we asked a fellow if he had seen anything, and he told me it rattled the walls of his barn when it was coming down," DiIulio said. "It sounded like a train was flying over my place," he said."

Before entering the atmosphere, the meteor was about the size of a pickup, but friction reduced it to small rocks, DiIulio said.

"We think this thing was easily over a ton in weight," DiIulio said. "This is a marvelous find."

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Staff photos — Rod Aydelotte

Michael Farmer, of Tucson, Ariz., holds up a piece of meteorite found Wednesday by Moritz Karl (left) as they searched near West with Robert Ward and Shauna Russell (right).

# Meteorite hunters find their prize

## Arizona team spots tiny piece of Texas fireball

**By Ken Sury**

Tribune-Herald staff writer

A reporter was talking with a pair of meteorite hunters Wednesday afternoon when one of them suddenly bent down and picked something up off the dirt, less than a foot from the writer's shoe.

Moritz Karl quickly showed it to his colleague, Michael Farmer, who eyed it quizzically for a split-second before saying, "Is that ... ?" Then, with realization, "That's it!"



**ONLINE:** View a slide show and video of the search team's discovery, or comment on the story at [wacotrib.com/meteorite](http://wacotrib.com/meteorite).

Pay dirt. A quarter-sized, roundish piece of chondrite meteorite was the Arizona team's first proof of a meteor that broke apart Sunday over Central Texas and now lies — by the group's estimate — in thousands of pieces across of a swath of northern McLennan County and probably southern Hill County.

"We have lots of dead-end hunts that don't pay off like this," said

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This quarter-sized piece of chondrite, the most common type of meteorite that falls to Earth, was the first found by the team from Arizona.



A Cox Newspaper

**TODAY**



**High: 62  
Low: 39**

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Waco Tribune-Herald

Feb 19, '09



# SEARCH

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Robert Ward, 32, who has hunted for meteorites for more than 20 years.

The foursome arrived in Waco from Arizona having a pretty good idea that Sunday's fireball over Central Texas, initially believed to be debris from last week's collision of a U.S. and Russian satellite in space, would leave meteor rocks strewn across the countryside, said Farmer, 36, senior member of the group and self-described "field adventurer."

The rumble and flash of the meteor Sunday caused countless Texans to call authorities and prompted the McLennan County Sheriff's Office to send a helicopter to search the northeastern portion of the county, including roughly where the Arizona group made their find Wednesday.

"This is a significant event," Farmer said. "This has worldwide interest, and you're going to have meteor hunters from all over coming here."

To underscore that point, two rival meteorite hunters, a Russian and an American who lives in Mexico, arrived before the Arizona group looking for the rocks and visiting with residents and property owners.

"The Russians beat us to it," Farmer said, his comment sounding a bit like the 1960s space race.

Karl, who usually lives in his native Frankfurt, Germany, said his father called him from Germany, where video of the fireball, captured by a TV cameraman videotaping the Austin Marathon, was on the news.

"They're saying it's satellite debris," the 26-year-old recalled his father telling him. "No, I told him, 'That was a meteor.'"

Shauna Russell, 23, the junior member of the group, said she and her colleagues had a good idea of where to look for the "strewn field" — the area of fallen meteorites — from triangulating the TV video and eyewitnesses who



Staff photo — Rod Aydelotte

Robert Ward, of Prescott, Ariz., searches along a dry creek bed for pieces from Sunday's fireball.

saw the fireball. It also helped to have images from Doppler radar that detected the fireball in the sky around Hubbard, she said.

The chondrite found Wednesday is what meteorite hunters find 90 to 95 percent of the time, Farmer said. He estimates the strewn field to be anywhere from a mile to 2 miles wide and from 5 to 10 miles long, though it could be shorter based on the meteor's sharp trajectory indicated in the video.

The group said the meteor, which likely hit the atmosphere at about 22,000 mph, could have been anywhere from the size of a refrigerator to a pickup before it began breaking apart. Residents within a few miles of the larger pieces falling would have heard whistling sounds like artillery shell zipping through the air, Ward said.

Farmer said he's made a living for 13 years hunting and collecting meteorites, which can be sold to universities, planetariums and other collectors. Those sales help fund his and Ward's meteorite chases, which have taken them to every continent except Antarctica on more than 50 hunts.

"There is an interest. These objects are worth money," he said.

As word gets out, Farmer

expects the area to overrun with professional hunters as well as amateurs, although he said he hopes people can help them find the space rocks, for which they might get paid.

"This is a big deal," said Farmer, who added that he's provided many of the meteorites in Texas Christian University's collection. "It might be 20, 30 years before you get another like this in Texas."

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## Texas Lottery Results

### WEDNESDAY'S DRAWINGS

Pick 3 day: 5-5-3 Sum: 13  
Pick 3 night: 9-1-5 Sum: 15  
Daily 4 day: 7-7-3-6 Sum: 23  
Daily 4 night: 6-2-7-2 Sum: 17  
Cash 5: 4-14-25-29-31  
Lotto: 25-37-39-45-52-54

### TUESDAY'S CASH 5

Winning numbers: 10-21-27-28-35  
Match 5: 1 (\$25,268)  
Match 4: 61 (\$189)  
Match 3: 2,604 (\$10)  
Match 2: 25,257 (\$2)

### TUESDAY'S MEGA MILLIONS

Numbers: 1-9-23-27-33 Bonus: 24  
Match 5 plus Bonus: 0  
Match 5: 1 (\$250,000)  
Match 4 plus Bonus: 3 (\$10,000)  
Match 4: 207 (\$150)  
Match 3 plus Bonus: 219 (\$150)  
Match 2 plus Bonus: 3,130 (\$10)  
Match 3: 9,315 (\$7)  
Match 1 plus Bonus: 17,974 (\$3)  
Match Bonus: 32,843 (\$2)  
Estimated next jackpot: \$120 million